
	LOS LUNAS POLICE DEPARTMENT		
	OPERATIONS	NUMBER: OPR.06.05(C)	EFFECTIVE DATE: December 19, 2011
	SUBJECT: Missing Children		REVIEW DATE: February 9, 2017
	AMENDS/ SUPERSEDES:	NMSA: 29-15-1, 29-15A-1	
NMMLEPSC STANDARDS: OPR.06.05(C)		APPROVED BY CHIEF OF POLICE NAITHAN G. GURULE  Signature	

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines and responsibilities regarding this agency's response to reports of missing children.

II. POLICY STATEMENT

- A.** It shall be the policy of this agency to thoroughly investigate all reports of missing children. Additionally, every child reported missing to this agency will be considered at risk until significant information to the contrary is confirmed.
- B.** Jurisdictional conflicts are to be avoided when a child is reported missing. If a missing child either resides in, or was last seen in this jurisdiction, this agency will immediately initiate the required reporting process. If a child resides in this jurisdiction and was last seen in another jurisdiction, but the law-enforcement agency covering that jurisdiction chooses not to take a missing-child report, this agency will assume reporting and investigative responsibility.
- C.** Questions concerning parental custody occasionally arise in relation to missing-child reports. It shall be the policy of this agency to accept the report of a missing child even if custody has not been formally established. Reporting parties shall be encouraged to obtain legal custody as soon as possible; however, since the safety of the missing child(ren) is paramount, members of this agency will open a case when it can be shown the child has been removed, without explanation, from his or her usual place of residence. If custody has not been established by the Court, then the law-enforcement responsibility is to ensure the child is safe only.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A.** The term missing child refers to a person who is
 - 1. Younger than 18 years of age; and
 - 2. Whose whereabouts are unknown to his or her custodial parent, guardian, or responsible party.
- B.** A missing child will be considered at risk when one or more of the risk factors apply.
- C.** Risk factors refer to a missing child who is:
 - 1. 13 years of age or younger.
 - 2. Believed or determined to be experiencing one or more of the circumstances:

a) Is out of the zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage. The zone of safety will vary depending on the age of the child and his or her developmental stage.

~~b)~~ Has mental or behavioral disabilities.

c) Is drug dependent, including prescribed medication and/or illegal substances, and the dependency is potentially life-threatening.

d) Has been absent from home for more than 24 hours before being reported to law enforcement as missing. While some parents may incorrectly assume 24 hours must pass before law enforcement will accept a missing-person case, a delay in reporting might also indicate the existence of neglect, abuse, or exploitation within the family.

c) Is in a life-threatening situation.

~~d)~~ Is in the company of others who could endanger his or her welfare.

g) Is absent in a way inconsistent with established patterns of behavior and the deviation cannot be readily explained.

h) Is involved in a situation causing a reasonable person to conclude the child should be considered at risk.

D. Actions upon determination of risk factors.

1. If it is determined risk factors are involved in the report of a missing child, the child will be considered at risk, and an expanded investigation, including the use of all appropriate resources, will immediately commence. While all missing-child incidents should be thoroughly investigated, those involving risk factors indicate a heightened likelihood of danger to the child and, therefore, require an intensive response.

If appropriate, existing interagency response protocols — including the AMBER Alert system and/or other immediate community notification methods, if available — should be considered.

IV. PROCEDURES

A. The initial officer or first responder assigned to the report of a missing child shall:

1. Respond promptly to the scene of the report.
2. Interview the parent(s) or person who made the initial report.
3. Obtain a detailed description of the missing child including photo(s) and videos.
4. Confirm the child is in fact missing. First responders should never assume searches conducted by distraught parents or others have been performed in a thorough manner.

Another check of the scene should be made and include places where children could be trapped, asleep, or hiding. Special attention should be paid to enclosures such as refrigerators, freezers, and the interior of parked vehicles where limited breathing air may place the child at even greater risk. In the case of older children, first responders should ask if parents have checked with the child's friends or perhaps overlooked or forgotten something the child may have said that would explain the absence.

5. Verify the child's custody status.
6. Identify the circumstances of the missing episode.
7. Determine when, where, and by whom the missing child was last seen.
8. Interview the individual(s) who last had contact with the missing child.
9. Identify the missing child's zone of safety for his or her age and developmental stage.
10. Make an initial assessment of the type of incident. Note: Officers must be cautious in "labeling" or classifying a missing-child case, since the classification process will impact the way in which initial information or evidence is gathered. Even if first indications suggest a "less urgent" incident, officers should consider all possibilities until the case category is clearly determined.

11. Obtain a description of the suspected abductor(s) and other pertinent information.
12. Determine the correct NCIC Missing Person File category and ensure notification is promptly transmitted.
13. Provide detailed descriptive information to communications unit for broadcast updates. As information becomes available regarding the missing child's physical appearance, circumstances of the case, or description of the potential abductor, the initial officer should ensure other officers and agencies are provided with up-to-date facts.
14. Identify and separately interview everyone at the scene. The name, address, home and work phone numbers of everyone present at the scene, along with his or her relationship to the missing child, should be recorded. If possible, include them in photos and/or videos of the incident scene. By interviewing each person privately, officers may be able to uncover information instrumental in resolution of the case.
15. Seal/protect scene, area of child's home, and areas of interest as potential crime scenes. First responders must take control of the immediate area where the incident occurred and establish an appropriate perimeter to avoid destruction of vital evidence. Extend search to surrounding areas and vehicles including those that are abandoned and other places of concealment such as abandoned appliances, pools, wells, sheds, or other areas considered "attractive nuisances." In addition to external crime scenes, the missing child's home, and particularly his or her bedroom, should be secured and protected until evidence and identification material such as hair, fingerprints, and bite marks are collected.
16. Inquire if the child has access to the Internet, cell phone, and/or other communications device. Before making an initial decision the child has run away, an officer should determine if the child may have left to meet someone he or she encountered while online. Even if a child willingly decided to leave home to join someone first met online, the child should be considered at risk.

17. Prepare necessary reports and complete appropriate forms.

B. The supervisor assigned to the report of a missing child shall:

1. Obtain a briefing and written reports from the first responder(s) and other agency personnel at the scene.
2. Determine if additional personnel and resources are needed to assist in the investigation.
3. Consider activation of the AMBER Alert system and/or other immediate community notification methods. If circumstances indicate the chances for the child's safe recovery would be increased by immediate public awareness, a supervisor should promptly activate such efforts.
4. Establish a command post.
5. Organize and coordinate search efforts. Systematic searches are common features of missing-child investigations. A supervisor should appoint a search operation coordinator who can oversee the search effort while the supervisor remains available to manage the entire investigation.
6. Ensure all required notifications have been made. Because dissemination of information is an integral part of the search for a missing child, the supervisor should ensure all officers, other departments and agencies, and all investigative networks are supplied with accurate details.
7. Establish a liaison with the victim family. Families of a missing child will experience extreme stress. Supervisors should establish a liaison with the victim family who can explain what investigative actions are being employed and what they can do to assist in the search. In addition, the liaison can help the family work with the media.
8. Confirm all agency policies and procedures are observed.
9. Manage media relations.

C. The investigator assigned to the report of a missing child shall:

1. Obtain a briefing from agency personnel at the scene. This briefing should be conducted prior to interviews with family

members of the missing child or witnesses who may have been identified during the initial stage of the case. Its objective is to assist the investigator in formulating an effective interview strategy.

2. Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information.
 3. —Initiate a neighborhood investigation.
 4. Obtain a brief history of recent family dynamics.
 5. Explore the basis for any conflicting information.
 6. —Complete all remaining key investigative and coordination steps.
 7. Implement effective case management.
 8. Evaluate the need for additional resources and specialized services.
 9. Update descriptive information. If it appears the case will not be promptly resolved, investigators should ensure the descriptive record, especially the information entered into the NCIC Missing Person File, is updated to include dental characteristics, scars, marks, tattoos, and fingerprints along with additional articles of clothing, jewelry, or unique possessions.
 10. Monitor media relations.
- D. An officer assigned to the report of an unidentified person, whether living or deceased, who appears to be a child, shall:
1. Obtain a complete description. Officers who are assigned to this task should use standardized information-gathering forms such as the NCIC Unidentified Person File Worksheet and data-collection guide. This information should be gathered in cooperation with the medical examiner or coroner. In cases involving skeletal remains, consideration should be given to consulting with a Forensic Anthropologist and Forensic Odonatologist to ensure all pertinent and accurate information has been gathered. NCMEC's Forensic Services Unit can provide assistance in this area.

2. Enter the unidentified child's description into the NCIC Unidentified Person File. This file is compared daily with the contents of the NCIC Missing Person File. Entries with common characteristics are flagged and both agencies are informed. Agencies should expect to receive this information/response overnight.
 3. Use all available resources to aid in identification of the child. NCMEC's Forensic Services Unit; NamUs (National Missing and Unidentified Persons System); missing-children clearinghouses; and other professionals, such as medical examiners, may be of assistance in the identification.
 4. Cancel all notifications after identification is confirmed.
- E. An officer assigned to the recovery or return of a missing child shall:
1. Verify the located child is, in fact, the reported missing child. An officer should personally verify all returns.
 1. Secure intervention services, if appropriate. During the verification process, officers should be alert for indications additional services may be needed before the child can be safely reunited with his or her family. These services may include mental and/or physical health examinations and arrangements for family counseling.
 2. Arrange the return of the child to his or her legal guardian or an appropriate children's shelter in the case of a runaway or missing child from within department jurisdiction who has been located and who is not wanted on a warrant or other law violation.
 3. Place the child in custody and transport him or her to the appropriate facility for admission in the case of a runaway from another jurisdiction or from out-of-state who has been located and for whom a warrant exists or for whom an NCIC missing-person "hit" is verified.
 5. Complete the appropriate supplemental reports and cancel all outstanding notifications. Along with cancellation of the NCIC Missing Person File entry and other notifications regarding the case, a supplemental report should be completed describing the child's activities while missing and circumstances of the recovery/return.